

La Copine: New California Cooking from an Oasis in the Desert

Claire Wadsworth

Nikki Hill

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La Copine is an enticing cookbook that captures the innovative menu and desert setting of Claire Wadsworth and Nikki Hill's California restaurant.

While running a catering business in Los Angeles, partners Wadsworth and Hill attended a sound bath near Joshua Tree National Park. A woman mentioned a local restaurant for sale; it "felt like destiny." In 2015, they opened La Copine as a queer-friendly desert mecca, with Hill as the chef and Wadsworth in the front of the house.

The book's Californian and New American cuisine is eclectic, reflecting the duo's desire to "find ways to elevate classic dishes that distinguish our place from the next." There are takes on famous sandwiches and salads, including the cheesesteak, banh mi, and a California Waldorf. The brunch dishes range from eggs to cold soups, and Southern influences are on display, too, via grits and beignets. Often, the dishes are photographed in the sun, with cacti as a backdrop; desert points of interest are enumerated, and a Spotify playlist is suggested too.

The mouthwatering recipes' instructions are thorough, and adaptability is their watchword. Many are vegan or gluten-free, or can be made so through simple substitutions. Multiple nonalcoholic spritzers are included, as are "winning" dessert formulas, as with panna cottas in four different flavors, in individual portions, that can be refrigerated until plating. Favorite kitchen tools and pantry ingredients are listed, as "the real secret of every restaurant is in the prep," making it a good idea to be 85 percent ready for a meal the day before.

Vivified by autobiographical pieces and essays on aspects of Wadsworth and Hill's approach, as well as a mixture of black-and-white and color illustrations, the lively cookbook *La Copine* tells the story of a destination restaurant with an inclusive attitude.

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